SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT

OF THE

CHURCH AND SOCIETY COUNCIL

MAY 2016

PROPOSED DELIVERANCE

The General Assembly:
1. Receive the report.
2. Note and reaffirm the deliverances agreed by the General Assembly of 1996 and 2014 which give thanks for the work of the European Union in promoting peace, security and reconciliation amongst European nations, note that the UK has been part of the European Union since 1973 and believe that the UK should remain in the EU.
3. Instruct the Church and Society Council, in the event of a decision to remain in the EU, to explore ways of increasing understanding of and engagement with the European Parliament and EU institutions.

REPORT
OUR PLACE IN EUROPE

1. Introduction

1.1 On 23 June 2016 there will be a Referendum on whether the UK should remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union. Over the last 20 years the Church of Scotland, through its General Assembly, has supported ongoing membership of the EU with a substantial report presented to the General Assembly in 1996 and shorter updates presented in 2002, 2005 and 2014.

1.2 The 1996 report "The European Union – a Crisis or an Opportunity?" recognised the importance of having a vision for the EU. It explained "The Church's support for ever closer union amongst the peoples of Europe is based on a belief that only by recognising the increasing inter-dependence of nation states and by transcending national barriers can we maintain and promote peace and democracy and have the power to bridge the gap between rich and poor both within Europe and between the developed world and the Third World."

"The moral argument for creating a single market within the EU and promoting its economic development is that increased economic resource is one of the principal means whereby the EU can promote peace, social justice, human rights and social wellbeing amongst the peoples of Europe based on a common heritage, common culture and common geographical boundaries. It matters a great deal that the EU should be far more than a convenient economic unit. The Church wants to promote a community of generosity. The EU must be an inclusive community caring not just for its ain folk but shouldering its fair share of responsibility for the wider world. By promoting social cohesion and solidarity amongst its members it must maintain peace in Europe and then apply these principles worldwide, transcending the barriers of national sovereignty."

1.3 The need for peace within Europe and within the world at large is as great as it has ever been; however, the EU and context in which it operates has necessarily changed in the last 20 years. In that time we have seen the creation of the Single European Currency and European enlargement as Eastern European states join the EU, more recently we have also experienced the financial crash, the Eurozone crisis and the arrival of large numbers of refugees who require help.

1.4 Within this context public debate around EU membership has often focussed on a few central issues such as the free movement of people, the economic costs and benefits of membership, the environmental implications, and the refugee crisis. In some fields, such as environmental protection, there have been clear successes, as the EU has driven environmental legislation within the UK in the last 30 years to a much higher standard than previously existed within the UK and other member states, equally the EU is expected to play an important role in ensuring member states implement the Paris agreement on climate change (CoP21). In other areas, such as responding to the arrival of large numbers of refugees, the EU is struggling as member states opt out of proposals for a shared and adequate response. Across Europe, the repercussions to the financial crash of 2009 have been felt, while controversial bail outs and fiscal requirements on some Eurozone countries have raised the issue of sovereignty and called the European decision making processes into the spotlight. It is within this context of great success and great struggle that our discussion takes place.

1.5 While individual members are free to make up their own minds on the issue, it is important for the Church as a whole to reflect on its existing stance within the current context. This report has been prepared by a working group including representatives from the Church and Society Council, World Mission Council and others.

2. Existing position

2014

83. Note and reaffirm the deliverances agreed by the General Assembly of 1996 which give thanks for the work of the European Union in promoting peace, security and reconciliation amongst European nations, note that Scotland has been part of the European Union since 1973 and believe that Scotland should continue to be a member; affirm that, whether as an independent nation state or as a part of the United Kingdom it is better for Scotland, Britain and Europe for the United Kingdom to remain in the EU.

2005

9. In recognising that the European Union has since its inception had peace as its fundamental objective and greatest achievement, affirm the view that membership of the EU is a positive good.

10. Encourage all within the Church to involve themselves in the debate on the proposed Constitutional Treaty, and to play their part in making that debate informed and factual.

2002

28. Affirm the principles of peace, freedom, justice and security as the primary goals of the European Union.

29. Support the enlargement of the European Union and urge HMG to explain the benefits of enlargement, both to member states and to candidate countries, to the UK electorate and thereby encourage open and honest debate of issues of genuine public concern.

31.   Urge HMG and the governments of other member states to adopt a spirit of generosity and co-operation in the allocation of funds for development in candidate countries.

1996

In 1996 The Church and Nation Committee report identified seven principles as a basis for restating the positive objectives of the EU, these were:

A democratic and transparent Union

A decentralised and diverse Union

A Union conferring rights of citizenship

A Union promoting economic and social wellbeing

A Union sustaining the environment

A Union for peace and international stability

A   Union   with   international responsibilities

3.   Principles underlying a vision for the EU today

3.1   As the UK approaches this significant decision it seems appropriate to revisit some of the principles outlined in 1996 and explore how the Churches' vision for Europe can be refreshed in response to the current public discourse.

3.2   A   union   which   is   democratic, transparent and diverse

3.2.1 The EU encompasses 28 member states and a range of policy areas including trade, the environmental legislation, and energy production. For a small number of these policy areas (those relating to the common market) the EU has exclusive competency, while for the majority the responsibility is shared between the EU and member states. The ability to co-ordinate common policy across 28 states is demanding and often requires a level of compromise from those involved. Nonetheless there are a number of checks and balances in existence with the Parliament (made up of directly elected representatives) and the

Council of the European Union (made up of Cabinet Ministers from national Parliaments) required to pass any legislation. Equally, any proposed law can be blocked if at least four countries veto it. So there are safeguards in place.

3.2.2 In addition, the EU operates on the principle of subsidiarity as outlined in Article 5(3) of the Maastricht Treaty: "Under the principle of subsidiarity, in areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Union shall act only if and in so far as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States, either at central level or at regional and local level, but can rather, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved at Union level." Alongside subsidiarity, which protects the self–determination of European States, the EU also holds principles of being representative of the European population who should be able to engage with the EU and hold it to account.

3.2.3 Here the intention is clear: that the EU has democratic control at its heart within a context of broader cooperation. The Scottish Parliament's European and External Relations Committee found "that there are weaknesses in the way in which the EU communicates its policies and initiatives, and this is evident in the lack of awareness among people in Scotland of the impact that the EU has had on their lives."[1] This is a clear challenge to be responded to, but it is a challenge about the perception of the EU rather than the structure itself.

3.2.4 The Church of Scotland has long held the position that being in solidarity with our neighbours is essential and that we must work within the EU to ensure that high standards of democracy and transparency are met. There is a role here for the Church to encourage people

1 Scottish Parliament European and External Relations Committee 2nd Report: 2016: EU Reform and the EU Referendum Implications for Scotland: http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/S4_EuropeanandExternalRelationsCommittee/Reports/EUS042016R02.pdf (accessed 30 March 2016)

in communities across Scotland to find out about the EU and to create space for dialogue with MEPs and institutions.

3.3 A Union conferring rights of citizenship

3.3.1 The concept of EU citizenship came into force with the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993. As members of the EU, EU citizens have political rights (including the right to vote in European elections, a right to vote and stand in local elections, a right to access the EU Parliament, Council, etc.), rights to free movement and the right to consular protection abroad if there are no diplomatic or consular authorities from the citizen's own state.

3.3.2 Of these rights the most discussed is perhaps the right to free movement. As part of their membership of the EU, all EU citizens are entitled to look for a job in another EU country, work there without needing a work permit, reside there for that purpose, stay there even after employment has finished and enjoy equal treatment with nationals in access to employment, working conditions and all other social and tax advantages. This is an important part of economic and social integration and overall the UK economy benefits from EU migration. Approximately 1.2 million British people live in other parts of the EU while around 3 million citizens of other EU nations live in the UK[2]. For some people these statistics represent years of living in an adopted home. For others these statistics represent a family member who holds citizenship of a different EU member state. Whether these long standing residents and mixed nationality families reside in the UK or elsewhere in Europe their right to family life and a home is an important aspect of EU membership. As a Church we should acknowledge the deep anxiety this Referendum causes for many people.

3.3.3 Throughout history there has been migration for positive and negative reasons.

Migration should ultimately be an enriching experience for both the migrant and the community in which they arrive, this requires intentionality in welcoming the stranger which is central to the work of the Church.

3.4 A Union promoting economic and social wellbeing

3.4.1 The EU has committed significant resources to alleviate poverty and prior to the financial crisis the number of people defined as "at risk of poverty"[3] had been declining steadily, reaching its lowest point in 2009. After the crash the number of people at risk of poverty started to increase again, peaking in 2012 before starting to gradually reduce again.[4] The Europe 2020 Strategy has set the target of 'lifting at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion' by 2020.

3.4.2 In the long term the EU has been an effective instrument for delivering social and economic improvement and it continues to fund programmes intended to mitigate the effects of the financial crisis. While it is clear that the way in which bail outs for some European countries experiencing financial crisis has been controversial, it should also be acknowledged that minimum standards for social and welfare provision across Europe are better achieved by working alongside our

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2 https://fullfact.org/europe/eu-migration-and-uk/ (accessed 31 March 2016)

3 In the Europe 2020 Strategy "the poverty target is monitored with the headline indicator 'people at risk of poverty or social exclusion'. This indicator is based on a multidimensional concept, incorporating three sub indicators on monetary poverty ('People at risk of poverty after social transfers'), material deprivation ('Severely materially deprived people') and low work intensity ('People living in household with very low work intensity')." Smarter, greener, more inclusive? Indicators to support the Europe 2020 Strategy; Eurostat Statistical Books: 2015 Edition: page 136: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/6655013/KS-EZ-14-001-EN-N.pdf/a5452f6e-8190-4f30-8996-41b1306f7367 (accessed 31 March 2016)

4 Eurostat Statistical Books: 2015 Edition: Smarter, greener, more inclusive? Indicators to support the Europe 2020 Strategy: page 138: http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/documents/3217494/6655013/KS-EZ-14-001-EN-N.pdf/a5452f6e-8190-4f30-8996-41b1306f7367 (accessed 31 March 2016)

neighbours. Our concern to look after those in need is not determined by their nationality or place of residence. Communities across Europe, including in Scotland and the UK, have benefited from the sharing of resources and freedom of movement which the EU has allowed.

3.5 A Union sustaining the environment

3.5.1 The EU has been one of the main drivers behind UK (and Scottish) environmental legislation in the past 30 years, setting new standards across a range of areas. The EU has undoubtedly had a great impact in raising basic environmental standards across Europe: bathing water is cleaner; air quality in urban areas is better and less waste goes to landfill. It has contributed significantly towards global action on climate change and can claim that it has succeeded in promoting economic growth in Europe while also reducing greenhouse gas emissions.

3.5.2 Much of EU environmental policy was originally established in response to environmental damage and pollution caused by industry. However, it has developed to embrace wider challenges of promoting sustainable development, action on climate change and safeguarding biodiversity thus making a vital contribution to UN treaties on all these themes. The EU will have an important role in ensuring member states implement the Paris agreement on climate change (CoP21) and has made a commitment to reduce the emission of greenhouse gases across the EU from 1990 levels by 40% by 2030. The Church of Scotland is part of an international call for climate justice and we are committed to working with partners in Scotland and around the world to take effective action to tackle climate change. Membership of the EU is an important vehicle through which our work in Scotland can contribute to meeting international emissions targets.

3.6 A Union for peace and international stability

3.6.1 The 2014 report to the General Assembly was written in the lead up to the Referendum on Scottish Independence and on the 100th anniversary of World War One. The report highlighted the role of the EU in promoting peace in Europe saying: "The post-World War II mechanisms for promoting peace and reconciliation in Europe are founded upon international institutions, the most prominent of which is the European Union. The absence of war between the nations of Western Europe since 1945 should be celebrated but never taken for granted, nor should the peacebuilding role of the EU and other institutions be underestimated."

3.6.2 Furthermore, the EU plays a large role in peacebuilding internationally, supporting hundreds of peacebuilding projects and, with its member states, contributing half of all global development aid. Recent terrorist attacks in Europe risk creating an environment of fear in which tensions between communities may escalate. This makes it imperative that European nations, including the UK, continue to actively seek closer relationships.

3.7A Union with international responsibilities

3.7.1 The UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) estimates that persecution, conflict and poverty have forced an unprecedented one million people to flee to Europe in 2015.[5] As of 21 December 972,500 had crossed the Mediterranean Sea, according to these UNHCR figures. In addition, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM) estimates that over 34,000 have crossed from Turkey into Bulgaria and Greece by land. The number of people displaced by war and conflict in 2015 is the highest experienced in Europe since

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5 Figures from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: Press Releases, 22 December 2015: http://www.unhcr.org/567918556.html (accessed 7 April 2016)

the 1990s as a consequence of conflict in the former Yugoslavia. At that time the EU was seen as impotent and there is a need to ensure that the international response to this situation is more effective.

3.7.2 The number of refugees arriving in Europe is a small part of a far bigger problem; the UNHCR estimates that there were 19.5 million refugees worldwide at the end of 2014 with developing countries hosting 86% of those people. In addition there are around 38.2 million people internally displaced within their own country.[6] Europe has a responsibility to protect people fleeing conflict who seek our assistance and we can do more in the UK and in Europe. On 16 March a group of Church organisations wrote to the European Council saying: "Based on our Christian faith and extensive experience of working with people in situations of extreme precariousness and vulnerability and with refugees inside and outside the European Union, we wish to call on you to develop more humane responses for refugee protection in full compliance with European obligations under international law and human rights so that the dignity of every person is respected and ensured."[7] It is through our membership of the EU that Scotland and the UK can add our voice to this call for justice.

4.   Conclusion

4.1   As was acknowledged in the 2014 report, "The EU and its policies are not above criticism, but the EU has contributed greatly to economic development in Scotland and not just in grants for infrastructure improvement. Above all, the EU has helped to secure a peaceful political environment in which the people of Europe can trade, travel, interact and work." The EU is a mechanism through which Scotland and the UK can be part of the international community tackling poverty, protecting our environment and holding national governments to account around their obligations to provide a place of safety for those who need it. The Church of Scotland is part of an international community of Churches where our voice can be added to those of our neighbours and our effectiveness can be magnified. It is therefore the view of the Church of Scotland that the UK should remain a part of the EU.

5.   Further Resources for Church members

5.1   The Joint Public Issues Team of the Baptist Union of Great Britain, the Methodist Church, the United Reformed Church and the Church of Scotland supported by the Scottish Churches Parliamentary Office have published "Think, Pray, Vote: EU Referendum resources for churches" to help and encourage to become informed on the issues surrounding the referendum. The resource can be downloaded from **www.jointpublicissues.org.uk** and **www.actsparl.org**.

In the name and by the authority of the Council

SALLY FOSTER-FULTON, *Convener*
RICHARD FRAZER, *Vice-Convener*
MARTIN JOHNSTONE, *Secretary*

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6 Figures from the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees: **http://www.unhcr.org.uk/about-us/key-facts-and-figures.html** (accessed 7 April 2016)
7 The letter was sent from ACT Alliance EU; Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe; Conference of European Churches; Eurodicaonia; EU-CORD on 16 March 2016: **http://www.ccme.be/fileadmin/filer/ccme/20_Areas_of_Work/01_Refugee_Protection/2016-03-16-EU_Refugee_and_Asylum_Policy_final_150316.pdf** (accessed 31 March 2016)